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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (Classified by line added)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE PM DEFENDS ACADEMIC RECORD

LISBON 00000975 001.2 OF 002

Classified by: Dana Brown Pol/Econ Officer for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On his two year anniversary as Prime Minister, Jose Socrates held a 90-minute interview on national television to recap the highlights of his tenure. Nevertheless, almost half of the interview focused on the controversy surrounding his higher education history and the rumors that he received special treatment during his course work. After defending his education record, Socrates went on to outline several of his administration's achievements, especially economic reform. End summary.

Education Investigation Turns Personal

12. (U) In late March, local newspapers "Expresso" and "Publico" published articles citing several discrepancies in documents on Prime Minister Jose Socrates' educational background during the course of a broader investigation into his alma mater, Independent University (Universidade Independente). Specifically, the press charged Socrates with failing to follow admission procedures when transferring to Universidade Independente in 1995 (when he was a member of parliament and shortly before being named secretary of state in the Ministry of Environment); claiming a higher degree than he had on official paperwork; and offering a senior government position to a former professor. The story caught the public's attention and gained momentum, increasingly drawing concern from the Socialist Party (PS) officials; however, Socrates did not publicly defend his record.

13. (U) On April 11, in an interview originally scheduled to discuss his first two years in office, Socrates strongly refuted claims that he had received special treatment due to his political visibility at the time. He stressed that he was proud of his academic record -- seven-and-a-half post-secondary years of study in civil engineering and business administration -- and had done everything expected of any student: attend classes, pay fees, and take exams. He produced numerous documents to support his position, and denied that the speculation had damaged his political standing.

14. (U) Asked why he had not said anything earlier, Socrates claimed he thought it best to wait for the Ministry of Higher Education to conclude its investigation of corruption allegations involving Universidade Independente before addressing the personal accusations. With that investigation now concluded, Socrates felt comfortable providing his side of the story. The Prime Minister said he had transferred from another institution to be able to complete his degree faster and that his Justice Minister had selected a former

professor for a Director General position in the Justice Ministry without Socrates' knowledge.

Socrates Highlights Successes

¶5. (U) After a full forty-minute defense of his educational background, Socrates moved into more familiar territory -- his Administration's policy successes. He responded to questions about his economic policy by explaining that Portugal was recovering and headed in the right direction. He asserted that the 1.3% GDP growth for 2006 was judged "timid" by critics but was in fact better growth than the 2002-2005 period combined (note: and had exceeded everyone's expectations.) In a reversal of normal political promises, he vowed not to cut taxes in 2009 to curry favor for his party and said he was focused on keeping Portugal on the reform track, even though it had cost his party votes in local elections. Socrates also mentioned that the government was cutting back on select services, most notably in underutilized hospitals and schools, to concentrate resources and improve service overall. He stressed that, although leftists criticized his Administration as too conservative, his government had passed progressive measures including a parity law to ensure more representation for women in government, and passed the law to legalize abortion in keeping with other European nations. Socrates said it was too early to decide whether he would run for re-election in ¶2009.

Comment

¶6. (C) More than one-and-a-half million Portuguese (more than fifteen percent of the population and forty percent of all Portuguese watching television at the time) tuned in to watch the first part of the interview, but the audience dropped significantly when the discussion turned away from his education record, an indication of how much attention this issue has garnered in the last several weeks. The decision to wait so long to address the allegations publicly was probably a political miscalculation, the Prime Minister's explanation notwithstanding. Socrates was clearly more

LISBON 00000975 002.2 OF 002

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comfortable in the interview discussing his achievements as Prime Minister than he was defending his academic record, but he probably did an adequate enough job addressing the concerns that have been raised. An influential professor and PS member who admires Socrates told us it is clear the Prime Minister transferred institutions because Universidade Independente was easier and that UI had granted him special treatment by not requiring him to submit the paperwork required of all other transferring students. That said, the Prime Minister would likely survive this political challenge, so long as the general electorate continues to approve of his job performance and so long as no subsequent information emerges that Socrates has not told the truth.

O'Neal